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ABSTRACT

Based on the assumption that a strong teacher contract can restrict the latitude of school administrators, this study tested the following hypothesis: School principals who participate fully in board-teacher collective bargaining as negotiators or active consultants will perceive themselves to have greater on-the-job discretion than principals who are not active in the process. Researchers surveyed 165 principals in two New York State counties about their negotiations roles and level of managerial discretion. Statistical analysis indicated that negotiating role and school district size were significantly related to differences in principals' on-the-job discretion. Principals in smaller districts had more discretion than those in larger districts. Through regression analysis it was determined that the roles of negotiator and active consultant provided principals with higher levels of perceived on-the-job discretion than did the roles of passive advisor and nonparticipant. Discretion was examined in such areas as assigning pupils, teacher discipline, calling additional meetings, and other managerial powers. The data did not indicate that sitting at the bargaining table provides principals with any stronger discretionary authority than being an active consultant does, but researchers concluded that principals should be consultants in the bargaining process to protect their own jobs and autonomy. (JM)

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THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE IN TEACHER-SCHOOL BOARD NEGOTIATIONS: PROTECTING MANAGERIAL DISCRETION?

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THE PRINCIPALS' ROLE IN TEACHER-SCHOOL BOARD NEGOTIATIONS:

PROTECTING MANAGERIAL DISCRETION?

School principals receive conflicting advice as to their appropriate role during collective negotiations between the board of education and the teachers union. Some observers suggest, quite persuasively, that principals should be full and active members of the school board's bargaining team, fighting for overall district goals while, not incidently, protecting their own managerial prerogatives.[1]

Certainly, a strong teachers contract can restrict the latitude of school administrators in the exercise of their duties, hampering their right to call faculty meetings, assign jobs to teachers (such as bathroom patrol), set the academic program, evaluate and discipline staff, and more. By sitting at the bargaining table, not only could principals keep the board's bargaining team informed of the impact of key bargaining points but also administrators might slow the tendency of the school board to sacrifice issues of management rights in return for lower teacher monitary demands.[2] The complaint of one Michigan principal, as reported in the The American School Board Journal, captures these concerns:

> They've [the board and superintendent] left us alone and unsupported while they've signed away everything to the teachers. And they've done it all directly--hardly consulting us. Now they don't just want us to live with their actions; they actually expect us to enforce them.[3]

Other writers admonish principals to absent themselves from the scene of collective negotiations, leaving such contract talks to board members, hired experts in labor relations, and top school management. The concern is that once bargaining is over, principals and teachers must once again work together.[4] Rancor developed during heated exchanges at the negotiating table can later poison the working relationship between school staff and leaders. On balance, some argue, the prerogatives retained through aggressive bargaining by principals hardly balance the anomosity and lost trust which may result from administrators assuming a tough and visible role during teacher negotiations.[5]

Hence, while many opinions have been expressed on both sides of the issue--some advocating bold action; others, discrete invisibility--little research has been done to determine the following: (1) whether principals are, in fact, taking an active role in school board-teacher union negotiations; (2) if they are, what that role in the process is; and (3) to what extent increased involvement leads to greater managerial prerogatives for principals.

The Study

The central hypothesis of this study is as follows:
School principals who participate fully in board-teacher collective bargaining as a negotiator at the table or active consultant will perceive themselves to have greater on-the-job discretion than principals who are inactive or absent from the process. Much has been written urging principals to become involved on management's side in those negotiations which affect

policies, programs, and the working climate in education. Caldwell and Curfman, for example, explain that building principals have major responsibilities for administering the contract and often receive the initial grievances from teachers union members against the school district.[6] As such, they can become the target of teacher consternation which is really directed at the entire labor relations system. Benson, too, stated that principals should be more than mere spectators when key policy decisions are made, as these administrators may ultimately be responsible for implementing terms in the teacher contract.[7] Also, principals, whether they help to fashion the teachers contract or not, will often have to interpret and enforce it. Thus, even if they do not help create the agreement between board and teachers, they would be responsible for implementing it.

Lieberman has emphasized the importance of the principals' role in contract administration, standing between the top managers and the "troops," the teachers. As such, principals must, according the Lieberman, be part of a highly unified management structure.[8] Similarly, the New York State School Boards Association urged that the board bargaining team be composed of an elementary and secondary school principal to be sure that pertinent managerial concerns are not bartered away in the press to save money.[9]

While all these studies and pronouncements would lend credence to the assertion that the more the principals are involved, the more their on-site managerial discretion would be preserved, no empirical research has been done to test the veracity of this wisdom. This study seeks to relate the school principals' negotiations function to their perceived authority to administer and manage their schools.

The role of principals in teacher-school board negotiations, the independent variable, was determined by asking principals to indicate their level of involvement in collective bargaining in eight possible bargaining activities:

1. Speaking on behalf of the Board at the table.
2. Participating in Board caucuses during bargaining.
3. Developing counter-offers to teachers' demands.
4. Sitting at the table as a silent observer for the board.
5. Reviewing board bargaining "package" prior to sessions.
6. Reviewing teacher demands during bargaining.
7. Attending periodic principals meetings to discuss progress of bargaining.
8. Attending workshops after bargaining to learn about contract.

From these eight types of involvement, a typology of principals' roles in teacher-board collective bargaining was developed and validated.

Principals' perceived managerial discretion, the dependent variable, was determined by use of a ten-factor Principals On-Job Discretion Scale which tested administrators' feelings about their freedom and constraint in managing their schools. Principals were asked to rate their authority in ten contract-related areas, on a five-point scale ranging from "complete discretion" (coded as a 5) to "no discretion" (1). These ten discretion areas included: DISCRETION TO: (1) transfer and assign teachers; (2) discipline teachers; (3) meet with teachers for professional purposes; (4) give teachers "extra work"; (5) improve teachers' instructional skills; (6) discipline students; (7) implement new curricula; (8) assign duties to teachers; (9) select texts and materials; and (10) assign students to classes and programs.

In determining the relationship between the bargaining role of principals and their sense of managerial discretion, other contextual variables were examined, such as the principals' age, years of experience, type of school, school size, school district size, principals' identification with management or unions, and principals' direct involvement with a principals' bargaining unit.

Methods and Procedures

To accomplish this study, a questionnaire was developed, pilot tested, revised, validated, and then mailed to a sample of school principals in New York, specifically the total population of principals in two counties. Of the 223 questionnaires mailed, 165 or 73 percent were returned in usable condition within six weeks. Through the responses to the questionnaires, it was possible to group principals by levels of involvement in the bargaining process, the independent variable, as follows:

Role I--NEGOTIATOR

Principals who "sit at the negotiations table" representing management and frequently speaking on the school board's behalf; also participating in caucuses with the school board's team reviewing, analyzing, and evaluating teacher demands; and assisting in preparing counter-offers to teachers' demands.

Role II--ACTIVE CONSULTANT

Principals who are working actively behind the scenes on behalf of the board's negotiating team through participation

in team caucuses, offering advice on teacher demands, assisting in the development of board counter-offers. But Role II principals do not appear at the negotiating table.

Role III--PASSIVE ADVISOR

Principals who are neither active nor visible on behalf of the school board's bargaining team, as their involvement is limited to an advisory capacity in pre-negotiations reviews and post-negotiations workshops to keep principals informed.

Role IV--NON-PARTICIPANT

Principals who have no defined role or involvement in the negotiations process, but who may participate in implementation workshops on how to live with the contract.

The relative amount of managerial discretion, the dependent variable, was determined through principals' responses to the ten-factor Principals On-Job Discretion Scale. Respondents were asked for their reaction to such areas of management activities as transferring, assigning, disciplining, and meeting with teachers, disciplining students, and establish programs. Hence, data were sought using a self-administered questionnaire to ascertain (1) involvement and role in teacher-board negotiations and (2) on-job managerial discretion.

To test the validity of the Principals On-Job Discretion Scale and its relationship to role in negotiations, three statistical procedures were performed. First, an analysis of scale reliability was made to see to what

extent the Principals On-Job Discretion Scale items worked together in discriminating high and local discretion scores. Table 1 shows the results of the test of reliability using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient procedure.

This test indicated an alpha coefficient of .77 for the ten items, confirming that the discretion scale was comprised of ten discrete items that worked together reliably. As shown in Table 1, the removal of any one of the ten items would have decreased the alpha score and thus the reliability of the discretion scale.

Table 1

Reliability Analysis of the Discretion Scale

Item	New Alpha Coefficient If Item Is Deleted
Control Over--	
1. Teacher Assignment	.75
2. Discipline of Teachers	.74
3. Meetings with Teachers	.75
4. Assigning Teachers "Extra Work"	.74
5. Improving Teacher Skills	.74
6. Student Discipline	.76
7. Curriculum Development	.76
8. Assigning Teachers Duties	.75
9. Book Selection	.76
10. Pupil Assignment	.75
**Reliability Coefficient = .77	

The role in collective bargaining was calculated by establishing four different types of involvement, based primarily on the work of Lutz and Caldwell.[10] They noted "spokesman," "observer," and "consultant" as possible functions, while advocating that of "consultant." Their recommendation may be well taken; but it is based on little more than sage advice.

Furthermore, for the purposes of this study, the Lutz-Caldwell typology does not seem to be based on an underlying continuum, from most active-visible to least involved. In this study, the researchers constructed a scale from most active (bargaining at the table) to least active (totally not involved in the process). When these eight functions--(1) bargainer at the table, (2) advisor at the table, (3) active advisor away from the table during the entire contractual process, (4) analyst of teacher demands for board, (5) developer of counter-offers, (6) recommender of positions prior to bargaining, (7) periodic discussant of teacher-board bargaining, and (8) non-participant only interested in carrying out contract after it is completed--were presented to principals in this study, their responses were tested to see if they formed a valid scale using a Guttman-like test.

The results indicated that the items formed a near perfect scale with few exceptions. The coefficient of reproducibility was .93, indicating that it worked well in ranking responses from very active to very inactive. That is, if one knew the highest response in the hierarchy, then it would be possible to reproduce the entire set of responses. For example, if a principal indicated a response #4, analyst, as the highest score on the scale, then this respondent also would indicate involvement in items #5 through #8: developing counter-offers, recommending to the board, and discussing, as well

as implementing. Therefore, the scale for determining a principal's role in the bargaining process appeared to work well in differentiating high and low levels of involvement.

Findings

This study resulted in three findings relevant to bargaining between school boards and teachers--and the role of principals in the process. The findings centered around the role of principals in teacher-board bargaining, their discretion as managers scale, and the relationship between role and on-job discretion.

1. Bargaining Role. As shown in Table 2, principals in this sample play a variety of roles in the negotiations process. Twelve percent of principals responding indicated that they "sit at the negotiations table repre-

Table 2

Principals' Role in Collective Bargaining

(N=165)

Role	n	Percent
1. Negotiator	20	12.0
2. Active Consultant	32	19.9
3. Passive Advisor	78	47.0
4. Non-Participant	35	21.1

senting management", and in many instances speak on the board's behalf. As

is constant with the Guttman-like scaling mentioned above, these respondents in Category I (Negotiator) also participate in board's bargaining team caucuses for purposes of reviewing, analyzing, and evaluating teacher demands, assisting the board in making counter-offers, and finally, in implementing the contract (Role #8). As such, these bargaining principals were highly active and visible as management's representatives.

A second group of principals, Role II--Active Consultant, were found to be highly active but less visible participants in the bargaining process on behalf of the school board. Twenty percent of sample principals attested to performing Role II, that is, they reviewed teacher offers, advised the school board on appropriate reactions, developed counter-offers--but stopped short of actual appearances at the bargaining table. As such, these respondents indicated that they "worked behind the scenes" in helping with negotiations.

By far the largest group of principals (78 or 47 percent) recorded that they were involved in pre-negotiations activities like offering advice to team negotiators, reviewing contracts, and explaining the impact of contract items to the board. Role III, Passive Advisors, also participated in post-negotiations workshops designed to inform principals of the meaning and intent of the new contract. This group of principals differed greatly from administrators in Roles I and II, in that they had no contact with school district negotiators, no opportunities for continuous contact during negotiations; their only opportunity came before and after the process was completed, at which time they were encouraged to make comments and give advice.

The last group, Role IV--Non-Participants, consisting of 21 percent (35 respondents), indicated no role in board-union bargaining in any way and

at any level. This group, according to their responses, was not asked to comment on the progress of bargaining, its substance, or its meaning. They felt totally outside the contract negotiations effort between board and teacher.

2. On-Job Discretion. The composite score on the Principals On-Job Discretion Scale indicates that more than one-third of the respondents felt some loss of managerial discretion around the ten contract items, such as assigning, transferring, and disciplining teachers. As shown in Table 3, thirty-seven percent responded that they had only some or little on-job discretion, while 54 percent had "considerable" and only 8 percent complete discretion.

Table 3

Principals' Composite Discretion Scores on Ten Contract Items

(N = 165)

Composite Discretion Score	n	Percent	X	SD
1. No Discretion	0	0	-	-
2. Little Discretion	2	1.2	-	-
3. Some Discretion	60	36.14	-	-
4. Considerable Discretion	90	54.22	-	-
5. Complete Discretion	13	8.43	-	-
Total	165	-	3.7	.64

Prior to relating the principals' role in collective bargaining to on-job discretion, it is important to determine what effect other contextual variables might have on the Principals On-Job Discretion Scale. These variables include school and district size, principals' years of experience, principal's identification with management (superintendent) or teachers (labor), and principal's affiliation with local, state and national associations and unions, such as the AFL-CIO.

To accomplish this analysis, step-wise linear regression was used to examine the combined effects of these contextual variables on the dependent (discretion) variable. The variables were regressed one variable at a time, in order to develop the best predictive model. The process continued until all contextual variables which had significant effect on the equation had been included. Thus, the prediction equation used all those variables included in the model prior to the step at which a significant drop in the variance occurred. The results indicate that one of the contextual variables, school district size, has a significant relationship to principals' discretion, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Analysis of Variance of Contextual Variables and Principals' Discretion

Analysis of Variance	DF	SS	MS	F
Regression	1	3.91	3.91	10.16*
Residual	162	62.44	0.38	

* $p < .01$

Table 5 lists the contextual variables and indicates that school district size had a significant relationship to the Discretion Scale, and should be included in the prediction equation.

Table 5

Significance of Contextual Variables

Variable	Beta Weights	F
School District Size	0.242	10.158*
Local Affiliation	0.077	.933 ns
State Affiliation	0.061	.972 ns
Principal's Age	0.052	.476 ns
High School	0.050	.128 ns
Teacher Identification	0.049	.425 ns
Jr. High/Middle	0.048	.384 ns
Principal's Experience	0.044	.337 ns
Management Identification	0.038	.244 ns
No Affiliation	0.032	.135 ns
AFL-CIO (AFSA)	0.031	.074 ns
Elementary	0.029	.063 ns
Neutral Identification	0.022	.083 ns
Constant	.4051	

*p < .01

Finally, to determine whether any interaction existed between school district size and principals' role in school board-teachers union bargaining, an analysis of variance was performed. Did the size of the district, in other words, affect in a significant way the role a principal played during collective negotiations? As shown in Table 6, it appears that size does not significantly affect principals' negotiating role. Though both school district size (.01) and principals' negotiations role (.05) have a significant relationship to principals' discretion, district size and principals' role do not appear to have a significant relationship to one another (see row 5). It can be assumed, therefore, that school district size does not alter in a significant way the role principals play in teacher-board negotiations.

Table 6

Analysis of Variance of Relationship
Between School District Size and
Principal's Negotiations Role

Source of Variation	SS	DF	MS	F
1. Within and Residual	58.12	157	.370	
2. Constant	2262.55	1	2262.55	6111.74***
3. District Size	3.64	1	3.64	9.83**
4. Negotiations Role	3.97	3	1.32	3.57*
5. District Size by Role	.71	3	.24	.64 ns

*p < .05 ** p < .01 *** p < .001

3. The Relationship Between Bargaining Role and Managerial Discretion. The main hypothesis of this study was that principals who participated more fully in school board-teacher union bargaining, as negotiator or active consultant, will perceive themselves as having greater on-job discretion than less active or absent principals. To measure this relationship, both analysis of variance and regression analysis were performed. As shown in Table 7, district size and principals' bargaining role (Negotiator, Active Consultant, Passive Advisor, Non-Participant) are significantly related to differences in principals' on-job discretion, at the .05 level. Table 7 also

Table 7

Analysis of Variance for Principals' Role and On-Job Discretion

	Sum of Squares	df	MS	F
Within Cells	58.835	160	.368	-
District Size	1.672	1	1.672	4.547*
Role in Negotiations	3.97361	3	1.324	3.602*
Overall	1153.920	1	1153.920	3138.029**

*$p < .05$ **$p < .001$

indicates that the overall relationship (district size and negotiations role combined) to discretion to be significant at the .001 level (row 4). The data, then, would appear to show that the principals' role in negotiations is

a major determinant of principals' on-job managerial discretion--even when school district size is accounted for.

The use of regression analysis also allows the prediction of principals' discretion scores, knowing the role administrators played in teacher-board negotiations and the size of districts in which they worked. Table 8 shows the regression coefficient for negotiations role, controlled for school district size.

Table 8

Regression Analysis of Principals as a Predictor of On-Job Discretion, With District Size Controlled

Variable (Role)	Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	Significant Level
1. Negotiator	.31	.18	NS
2. Active Consultant	.33	.15	.05
3. Passive Advisor	.03	.13	NS
4. District Size	.01	.01	.05
r .34			

The role of Active Consultant showed the highest predicted discretion score (.33) which was significant at the .05 level; Negotiator, the most active role, came next with .31 score but was not significant. Thus, the hypothesis is supported, showing that an active role is a better predictor of managerial discretion than more passive, inactive roles; but Negotiator, Role I, did not

prove to be the highest, and most significant, stance for principals to take.

Table 9 portrays much the same results, though perhaps somewhat more clearly. It shows that Active Consultant has the highest predicted scores on managerial discretion, even when district sizes vary. Active Consultant principals in small districts had the highest predicted score (4.03 out of

Table 9

Principals' Discretion Prediction Scores
Using Regression Equation

Principals' Role	Small District (2 Principals)	Medium District (5 Principals)	Large District (9 Principals)	Very Large District (35 Principals)
Negotiator	4.01	3.98	3.94	3.68
Active Consultant	4.03	4.00	3.96	3.70
Passive Advisor	3.67	3.64	3.60	3.34
Non-Participant	3.70	3.67	3.63	3.37

a possible score of 5.0) while "very large" district Active Consultants scored less (3.70). Negotiator scored slightly below Active Consultant; again, smaller districts tended to produce higher predicted discretion results than larger ones. By far the lowest predicted scores of on-job managerial discretion were registered by Passive Advisors (3.34) and Non-Participant (3.37), while smaller district qualities tended to improve the results slightly for Passive Advisor (3.67) and Non-Participant (3.70).

Discussion

From this study, it appears that the results are consistent with the general hypothesis that greater activity leads to greater on-the-job managerial discretion, though with some interesting elaboration. First, the data seem to confirm the contention that the principals' role in bargaining is important as a determinant and predictor of discretion. Though school district size proved to be important, it did not diminish the effects of role in collective bargaining for principals in this study.

Second, size of district did seem to exert some influence over discretion scores across principals' roles. Generally, the smaller the district, the greater the level of managerial discretion, a finding not totally unexpected, given the diminished authority of middle administrators in large school bureaucracies despite the role of principals at the bargaining table.

Similarly, the overall findings are consistent with much of the advice given to principals to be aggressive during policy-making (bargaining) to protect their rights and authority as administrators. Most interestingly, perhaps, is the finding that sitting at the table does <u>not</u> seem to be the best way for principals to protect their interests and job discretion. Rather, working vigorously "behind the scenes" as an Active Consultant works better to see that principals' interests are considered. Perhaps, the immediate advantages of being right in the line of fire are diminished by the sense of exposure, sometimes guilt, or even impotency of having to face down the teaching staff in front of the superintendent, school board president, and even the press, if bargaining is done in public (as "bargaining in the 'sunshine'" has been mandated by state laws in a number of places).

Being active, but invisible, proved to be slightly better than sitting at the table in this study. Perhaps principals feel more secure, better able to speak their minds and more effective getting their points across when they do not actually have to participate publicly. Instead, having a legitimate place in the process as a bona fide consultant to the board's official bargaining team may be better, at least in light of the slight differences in these data.

Three limitations of this study may weaken the conclusions somewhat. First, the results of the overall composite discretion scale for principals tended to be high with 54 percent indicating that they had "Considerable Discretion." Thus, though there were significant differences between high and low groups on the discretion index as related to role in collective bargaining, the large number of principals recording moderately high levels of perceived discretion prevents one from concluding with complete certitude that inaction breeds managerial emasculation--though the trend in the data tends to support that assertion.

Second, these data were gathered on the "perceptions" of administrators as to their levels of managerial discretion. Another approach which was tried but rejected in this study was to analyze the actual teachers contracts to see if principals' roles affected the presence or absence of management-related language in the agreements. Such an approach overlooked the importance of administrator <u>perceptions</u> of their freedoms as managers--conditions which may be more powerful as motivators than the contract itself. Hence, if principals are convinced that they were left out of the process, that the contract is strongly pro-teacher and anti-administrator, and that whatever

they try in their schools will be attacked and "grieved" against by teachers, then the fact that the agreement is still somewhat in their favor makes little difference.

Finally, the source of these data is somewhat limited, being two counties outside New York City. It would be useful to test the relationship between bargaining role and managerial discretion in other regions and in large cities where principals are clearly not involved in bargaining and sometimes take a pro-union position on certain issues.

Even considering the limitations of this study, one can conclude that principals do have an active and vital role in teacher-board negotiations, with 12 percent of this sample actually sitting at the table and an additional 20 percent working as Active Consultants. Only 21 percent stated that they were total Non-Participants. Principals also indicated that they perceived themselves to have varying levels of on-job discretion to deal with staff, pupils, and curricula. This limitation in discretion was related statistically and significantly to the role of principals in contract bargaining, particularly when the size of the school district was considered.

One can conclude, then, that principals should play an active and interested role in bargaining with teachers, though not necessarily as one of the bargainers for the board.

This involvement may work in two important ways. First, it may actually prevent the board of education from "giving away the ship," actions which often adversely affect the managerial capabilities of principals in their schools. Second, such involvement may have the added effect of giving principals a valuable sense of stewardship over the internal opera-

tions of the school system. Hence, being an active part of bargaining may have the combined effect of protecting administrators and at the same time engaging them in the process of making and enforcing district personnel policies.

NOTES

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10. F. Lutz & W. Caldwell, "Collective Bargaining and the Principal." In D. Erickson & T. Reller (Eds.) The Principal in Metropolitan Schools. Berkeley, California: McCutchan Publishing Company, 1979.